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THE FOUR PICTORIAL REPRESENTATIONS OF THE ELIZABETHAN STAGE.

In his recent doctoral thesis, *The Shakesperian Stage*,¹ Mr. Albright has given us a valuable study of the staging of Elizabethan plays. He presents a new and interesting theory² (for as yet, surely, it can be regarded only as a theory) of the structure of the stage, the kernel of which is that the doors to the lower stage were proscenium doors, and that above these were proscenium windows. Every person who studies carefully the stage-directions of the Elizabethan plays must come to the conclusion that the main doors of the lower stage were outside the curtain of the inner stage. Mr. Albright's theory of proscenium doors meets this requirement, is simple and plausible, and explains satisfactorily many details in the staging of Elizabethan plays. Since it is the best explanation that has yet been offered, it may be accepted until some better theory is presented, or until some definite evidence comes to light.

Having thus in general terms stated the value of the thesis, I shall devote the rest of this review to examining Mr. Albright's discussion of the four extant pictorial representations of an Elizabethan stage—the Swan, the Roxana, the Messallina, and the Red Bull—for here, I believe, he is least convincing.

In his Introduction he says: 'In selecting illustrations from the Elizabethan drama I have asked myself but three questions: 1. Was the play, from which the illustration is taken, written in the period 1576-1642? 2. Was it written for one of the regular or private theatres? 3. Was it a normal play? Other questions concerning dates of performance and publication, and theatres at which the plays were produced, have not entered, and, as I conceive, should not enter this discussion of principles and typical conditions.' The wisdom of this method may be questioned. Not only were some playhouses circular or polygonal, and some rectangular, but the private playhouses differed in many ways from the public, were wholly enclosed, were

¹ *The Shakesperian Stage*, by Victor E. Albright. The Columbia University Press. New York, 1909. (8 vo. pp. xii, 194. \$1.50).

² This theory, it is interesting to note, has been suggested also by Mr. William Archer, who, working quite independently, arrived at the same conclusion. Mr. Albright published a summary of his thesis in January, 1908; Mr. Archer published his 'The Elizabethan Stage' in *The Quarterly Review*, April, 1908.

smaller, and were used for night performances. It may be, therefore, that the arrangement of the stage (particularly the posts, the shade, the heavens, the gallery, the windows) differed likewise; certainly it is hard to conceive of Mr. Albright's 'typical Shakesperian stage', as pictured in his frontispiece, fitted into a small, enclosed, rectangular private playhouse, like the Blackfriars. Moreover, from the erection of the first playhouse in 1576, to 1642, some important changes in the structure of the stage might have come about. It does not seem likely that the stage remained stereotyped while the art of the playwright was advancing so rapidly, especially in view of the fact that all the stage-construction was of wood. Mr. Albright himself admits that "many 'probabilities' have been put forth to prove that the regular theatres differed as to the main parts of their stages, but no unquestionable facts." Finally, not a few of the plays were edited for closet reading, and furnished with stage-directions that do not always reflect actual conditions of performance; for example, the 'Ages' of Heywood. A thorough study of the internal arrangement of the Elizabethan playhouses would involve a consideration of all these facts.³

Having assumed that all stages from 1576 to 1642 were alike, Mr. Albright finds trouble at once in the four pictorial representations of the Elizabethan stage: 'The conditions, if the pictures are all genuine, make it impossible to establish a typical stage of the period. Therefore a searching inquiry must be first made as to the origin of these plates.' At the end of this inquiry Mr. Albright comes to the conclusion that his previous assumption of a typical stage required: 'The result of our research on the four pictures stands as follows: the Swan and Red Bull are fairly challenged, if not completely disproved; the Roxana and Messallina may be accepted as authentic pictures, the former showing a college stage of the period, and the latter a regular public Elizabethan stage, perhaps that of the Red Bull. (As these two stages are one in principle, we shall regularly refer hereafter only to the Messallina.)'

Let us examine Mr. Albright's 'searching inquiry.' In the first place we have a right to complain that he has not reproduced these four pictures that he so freely compares and discusses. Of course the Swan, and, to a less extent, the Red Bull drawings are accessible in other works; but the Roxana has seldom been reproduced, and to many readers of the thesis will be inaccessible. Even the picture of the Messallina that is

³Mr. Albright, however, has not acted without deliberation, and he has chosen his method, 'hoping that the loss in accuracy will be more than compensated by the gain in clearness.

given is poor, for it is reproduced from a rotograph instead of a photograph. The result is that one must accept on faith the author's conclusions, or go to not a little trouble in assembling the pictures for comparison. Mr. Albright excuses his not reproducing the Roxana by saying, 'these two stages (the Roxana and Messallina) are one in principle.' This, I believe, is untrue; at least it is untrue if the Messallina embodies, as he contends, the principles of his typical stage. The Roxana represents a stage during the performance of a play; the upper balcony is occupied by spectators, and the curtains at the rear are used apparently for entrance and exit. In these respects the Roxana and the rejected Red Bull are alike. The Messallina represents a bare stage; and if this stage was used in the manner assumed by Mr. Albright, then it cannot be declared 'one in principle' with the Roxana.

In order to 'explain away' these facts in the Roxana drawing, Mr. Albright informs us that it probably represents 'a college stage.' This conclusion seems unwarranted. Alabaster, the author of the play, was at college in 1583-1592, and possibly (though of this there is not the slightest evidence) wrote the play then. The play, however, was not published until 1632, and then was printed, not at Cambridge, but at London. It seems fanciful to suppose that the engraver employed by the printer to make the title-page knew that the author wrote the play at college nearly half a century earlier, that it was acted then on a college stage; or, even if the engraver knew these facts, it seems an unwarranted assumption that he drew a representation of 'a college stage, perhaps that of Trinity.' Mr. Albright's conclusion is not so obvious as he would have us believe.

Again, it does not seem to have occurred to Mr. Albright that both the Roxana and the Messallina title-pages may have been engraved by the same man; or that the engraver of the Messallina title-page may have copied the Roxana title-page. The similarity of the title-pages is too striking to have been accidental. A careful study of the figures—their sandals, costumes, the position of their arms, and their facial expression—as well as the general arrangement of the title-page, shows almost conclusively either that the same artist produced both title-pages or that the second was copying from the first. If either be the case, the value of the two pictures, in so far as they corroborate each other, is destroyed; more, if the two pictures are by the same artist, one represents his conception of the bare stage, the other his conception of the same stage in use, and the two pictures taken together not only do not support Mr. Albright's conception of the typical stage, but actually

offer evidence against it. I believe, however, that the engraver of the *Messallina* was copying the *Roxana*. He seems to have been an inferior artist throughout, and perhaps represented a bare stage because of the difficulty of peopling it with characters.

Mr. Albright informs us that the *Messallina* engraving represents the stage of some public theatre, 'maybe that of the Red Bull.' Certain objections to this statement suggest themselves at once: the *Messallina* stage has no posts, no shade, no heavens, all of which, we know, existed on the stage of the public theatre; it has no curtains to the upper stage, and no railing; and, in general, this upper stage (if it be such) is quite unfitted for acting. After all, was this part of the picture intended, as Mr. Albright thinks, to portray an upper stage? It is hard to believe that the engraver meant this bare shelf to represent the often used and commodious upper stage of the Red Bull public playhouse. Conceive, if possible, this shelf as the interior of a room, furnished with a bed and other properties, and occupied by a dozen or more actors. Are we not, rather, to think of the curtained space at the rear as intended for the upper stage? Mr. Albright, however, explains this as follows: '*Messallina* shows a small square curtain at the rear of the gallery which undoubtedly closes a window.' Yet he gives to the gallery the following dimensions: 'a space 20 to 25 feet wide and 10 to 12 feet deep.' According to Mr. Albright's own figures, this 'small' square is at least ten feet wide—absurd dimensions for a window.

In speaking of proscenium doors, Mr. Albright remarks: 'The *Messallina* picture, as it stands, is wholly neutral, offering no proof for or against doors': again, in speaking of the proscenium windows over the proscenium doors, he says: 'Here again, the *Messallina* being neutral,' etc. Yet, if we take the *Messallina* 'as it stands,' we find that instead of being neutral it disproves the existence of proscenium doors and windows, for the sides of the gallery *actually recede*. The back part of the stage seems to be set forward, like a chimney.

I have thus tried to show that the *Roxana* and the *Messallina*, 'the two authentic pictures of the Elizabethan stage,' offer practically no proof of Mr. Albright's typical stage, but,

'An exception is to be noted in the case of the Hope theatre, which was designed both 'for players to plaie in and for the game of beares and bulls.' The contract specifically requires Gilbert Katherens, the carpenter, to 'builde the *heavens* over the saide stage, to be borne or carried without any postes or supporters to be fixed or sett uppon the saide stage.'

on the contrary, offer much evidence against it. To assume that many important details of the stage were cut off at the sides by the engraver, is to assume too much. We must consider the pictures 'as they stand.'

Mr. Albright rejects the Swan drawing absolutely, and makes no use of it after remarking that it is 'fairly challenged, if not completely disproved.' This will not do. I venture to say that the Swan drawing is as near a representation of a public playhouse as is the *Messallina*, of which he makes so much. It may be inaccurate in many details, and possibly in some important features, yet in its main outlines it agrees with what we know of the Elizabethan public playhouses. To treat the drawing with contempt is unwarranted.

Of the Red Bull drawing Mr. Albright shows conclusively that it does not represent the stage of the public open-air Red Bull Theatre; but he does not, by any means, prove that it fails to embody, possibly, the general features of some Elizabethan playhouse in which performances took place at night. The upper balcony is more in keeping with regular playhouses than with the 'hastily improvised stages anywhere throughout the country,' which he would have us believe this represents. It is worthy of note, too, that the upper gallery is filled with spectators, as in the two other pictures that show a stage in use, the *Roxana* and the *Swan*. Even if the drawing represents 'an imaginary' stage, the imagination may have drawn its material largely from the well-known playhouses. I cannot agree with Mr. Albright that 'this picture in no sense represents an Elizabethan stage.' On the contrary, I believe that possibly it represents in several respects the stage of some private playhouse.

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